

Ice. Jen's Jan Prose Challenge.

London is an explosion; the slowest explosion in the history of the world. If you are lucky you can be blown free and land in some pleasant town populated with honest and friendly people. Sometimes a person can get caught up in the force of the explosion and flung far over the horizon.

Morton Pail willingly stood in the way and took the full force of the explosion on his back. He was thrown so far away that road and rail could not help him to land again.

Morton Pail landed on the ice in a helicopter that left him again soon after.

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A single solitary soul right on the edge of anywhere surrounded by an ice desert; pure white snow and an often blue sky. Here sat poor Morton Pail, a man of simple needs, alone.

The company had sent just him. Someone new was meant to follow after the first month, but no one had come. Not even a helicopter with fresh bed sheets.

Alone sat Morton Pail in his seat by the safety glass window. Alone as far as people go, but talking to his newest friend.

"Hello my friend," said Morton, lifting his head off the desk. "How are you this morning?" Morton drank a mouthful from his cup of coffee and waited for the sun to answer. "Not feeling chatty today? No problem, if you don't mind listening." The isolated man spoke loudly so the sun could hear him through the criss-cross glass.

"You know me, friend, we have known each other for three months now..." Only one month really, but time felt longer for Morton Pail in his building in the snow. "...and this is why I call you friend. You have been with me through my worst days and comforted me as I slept. You are always in the sky, in front or behind my little hut; I can always trust you to be there." Morton took another smaller sip.

"Today I woke up and felt a little odd. I know I say every morning feels odd down here, but this was something new." Another sip of coffee as Morton watched the sun dipping towards the hills on the horizon. "Today I woke up with a funny feeling in my arms." Morton raised both arms to the sun for emphasis. "My shoulders are okay and so are my upper arms. Also my forearms and wrists are okay too. It's my hands that are making my arms feel odd." The bearded man held his palms up to the sun that watched kindly through the big glass window.

"You see, they don't feel like my hands anymore. My hands are useful hands. All my life my hands have done things to help me out. My hands earn me money and grasp for me, useful things." The coffee cup is raised for all to see. "Since I have been here it is just my fingers that press the little buttons on the keyboard. My hands are bored and are rebelling against me. It's as if other hands, rebellious hands, have swapped with my own in the night. I feel like these are not my hands." The sun said nothing in

reply, just threw a little warmth onto its friend's palms. The sun knew they really were poor Morton's hands.

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Morton stood with his fingers curled around the door handle for five minutes before turning back towards the safety glass window. "My friend, I have decided to go for a walk. I am sure that I can find something for my hands to do outside. If I put them to work then maybe they will start to feel like my own again." The sun didn't approve of Morton leaving the building. It knew, as seasons changed, the heat from its mass was too shaded on this part of the globe.

The poor man might freeze to death.

The star looked down at the little man walking through the snow and ice, wrapped up warm but still dangerously exposed.

"What have we here?" said Morton, to no one in particular. He had stopped at the edge of a dry valley; one of the famous strips of tundra where nothing can grow above ground and anything that dies gets freeze-dried by the strong, merciless winds.

With a hammer from his pocket Morton split a couple of rocks, exposing and instantly murdering the iron-eating plants inside. Using the light from his best friend's body he studied the veins of dying plants, his hands twisting and turning the rock before his eyes; feeling useful again.

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"I found us a new companion." said Morton to the sun. Behind him he was dragging the freeze dried carcass of a seal. "This is General Seal. He told me he wanted to live outside my window. He loves to play I-spy and is excited about joining our little family." Morton's voice sang out in happiness as he walked backed to the building in the snow.

The sun watched Morton prop the emaciated carcass against the safety glass window with its tight dead grin facing into the room. That tiny taut body closer to Morton than the sun itself could ever be.

Sitting at his table with a fresh cup of coffee Morton looked at his new friend. "Hello General Seal. Shall we have a game now?" The seal said nothing; its body was gently soaking up water and bacteria from the snow.

"I'll go first then. I-spy with my little eye something beginning with 'I'," chuckled Morton, he knew this was a good one. The sun never got this one.

"My you are a clever seal; you got that one in only three tries." Morton finished his coffee, throwing his head back and letting the tepid liquid down his throat. He looked up for the sun. For the first time since he had arrived the sun had vanished behind the hills in the distance. The darkness was eerie and new for Morton in his little hut.

"Where have you gone my friend?"

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“General Seal, why aren’t you talking to me? You sit there slumped against my glass in silence.” Morton was crouching close to the window, his desk pushed to one side. “Won’t you even play I-spy with me anymore?” He could hardly see the body of the seal on the other side of the glass. The sun was spending more and more time away.

When the sun did come to check up on the little man in the hut it felt rejected and unwanted; used for its light and little more. It left less and less warmth with Morton every time it slipped back below the horizon.

One day, when the sun was paying the briefest of visits to the little hut in the snow it saw Morton outside by the safety glass. The man was sobbing into his gloves over a rotting pile of seal flesh.

“Why, General Seal? Why have you done this? Your smile once shone in on me through my criss-cross glass, now you are slowly slipping away.” Morton nudged the pile of stinking meat with his boot. His hand covered his mouth and nose to try to stop the smell of rot.

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Morton lay on his side on the table. The darkness held him tight and heavy like a corpse rolled up against the grid of glass. His body still and his eyes staring out towards the horizon through a greasy circle drawn with his finger in a steamed apology.